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BARTOLOMEO, THE CHARLATAN, ADDRESSING THE CROWD.

THE DEAD BRIDAL.

A VENETIAN TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

BY JONATHAN FREKE SLINGSBY.

CHAPTER VI.

"Amongst many other things that doe famouse this citie, the mountebankes are not the least; for although there are mountebankes also in other cities of Italie, yet because there is a greater concourse of them in Venice than elsewhere, and that of the better sort and the most eloquent fellows; and also for that there is larger toleration of them here than in other cities, therefore they use to name a Venetian mountebanke for the Coryphæus and principall mountebanke of all Italie. I have observed marvellous strange matters done by some of these mountebankes; moreover, I have seen some of them doe such strange iugling trickes as would be almost incredible to be reported."—*Coryat's Crudities.*

THE cheery sun of a spring morning was shining down upon the waters that flowed around and through Venice—not as he shines upon us here in Britain on an April day, now blotched and blotted out from the face of heaven by a mass of clouds, now struggling through lighter vapours, now laughing them away with his brightness of mocking their tears with his smiles—no, but looking down through a cloudless sky, in which there was not one fleck of white to chequer the universal blue, and scarce a breeze to temper a warmth that would be to us at home as the heat of summer. The hour was, judging from the sun's elevation, midway between dawn and noon; and the gondolas were skimming to and fro along lagunes and canals, just as hackney-coaches in the days that are now gone by, and Hansoms and cabs at present, ply through our metropolis, only in a manner far more easy to the half-recumbent body, and more picturesque to the half-closed eyes. As one of these aquatic coaches sped along through the Canale Grande, close by the water's edge, it was encountered by a similar vehicle, which shot suddenly from under one of the low narrow bridges that span the smaller canals which everywhere open into the principal one, as the smaller arteries into the great ones. Accidents of this sort will even still sometimes happen in Venice now-a-days, notwithstanding the marvellous skill and dexterity of the gondoliers; and, of course, there is no reason why the oars and men of five hundred years ago should be exempt from a casualty which their modern successors cannot always avoid. The boatmen of the respective gondolas commenced forthwith to indulge in that species of vituperation which, in all times, seems to have been a favourite mode of warfare with the propellers of conveyances when impeded in their motion, from the days of Juvenal, who commemorates the "stantis convicia mandra," to those of our own days, when our ears have been edified with the maledictory slang in which London cabmen apostrophise each other's eyes when they meet and obstruct each other in a narrow thoroughfare. The gentleman, for such he was, who sat within the first-mentioned gondola started up and drew back the curtains, with the intention, very probably, of personally resenting the insolence of the other gondolier, in case he found that his fare was of a sex and constitution with whom he could quarrel; and, indeed, such results were not very uncommon amongst a people where the blood was as quick as the pride was sensitive. How the matter might have ended it would be difficult to say, nor indeed would it, as will appear, be very important to speculate, had it not so happened that at the same moment the occupant of the assailing gondola—for such we consider the one which came from the smaller canal was—also pulled aside the curtain which screened him, and they both were face to face. An exclamation of surprise was uttered at the same moment by each of the gentlemen.

"Jacques!" cried the one.

"Giulio!" cried the other.

The boatmen, seeing the friendly recognition with which their respective fares greeted each other, at once discontinued their wordy contest, and, by a tacit understanding, they brought their gondolas side by side, so that the two gentlemen were able to exchange a cordial grasp of the hand.

"Ben arrivato a Venetia, ben arrivato carissimo mio," cried our old acquaintance, Giulio Polani. "Per Bacco! you were about the last man I should have expected to see in our fair city."

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"Pardieu!" replied the stranger in an accent that had something of the farther side of the Alps in it. "Pardieu, my dear Polani, it may be so, yet, nevertheless, here I am, and I assure you I count myself fortunate that almost the first respectable face I have seen since my arrival in your bella Venetia should be that of so dear a friend. Ben trovato, ben trovato!"

"Well, and whither are you going now, Jacques?"

"Faith, nowhere in particular, Giulio; I was about to kill an hour or two at this unfashionable time of day, and for that purpose I put myself into the care of this worthy, ce monsieur le gondolier, who has, as you perceive, made so excellent an attempt just now to kill your humble servant instead of his enemy, Time. Ma foi, I should not much like to make much acquaintance with the bottom of your canals; and as to the surface, we have been shooting this half hour through all sorts of dykes that look like over-grown sewers, and under little, low bridges that make one involuntarily take off his bonnet and bow his head in token of respect for such stupendous creations."

"Or out of regard for your own aigrette and feather, and your exquisite chevelure, Jacques," added Giulio, laughing. "But come, my friend, you shall put yourself under my guidance. Let your gondolier put round," said he, making a sign to the boatman; "I was just going to the Palazzo Polani, which is close at hand here, when those fellows knocked the heads of their boats together."

The men obeyed the signal, and both gondolas skimmed side by side along the water for a short distance, till they stopped beside a flight of marble steps that, rising from the water, led up to the portico of the Palazzo Polani. The two gentlemen left their gondolas, and ascending the steps passed into the mansion.

"Well, Taddeo," said the gondolier of Count Giulio to him who had rowed the stranger, "what hast thou got there, lad? Thou lookest as if thou wert bitten by a tarantola? Has the stranger, with all his bravery, given thee base coin or a paltry zecchino?"

"Proprio il diavolo! no such thing, Christophero," replied the man addressed, who was intently regarding something in his hand. "The eccellenza is a true noble, a lord or a prince, or an emperor mayhap. Look you, 'tis a real yellow golden piece," and he held it up between his finger and thumb admiringly.

"A golden florin, by St. Nicholas!" cried the other. "Thou art in good luck to-day, Taddeo mio. But thou knowest one half of that is a 'buonmano,' and thou art bound to drink the health of his excellency. So come, lad, thou shalt take me with thee to aid in doing him honour. Besides, thou owest me something for running foul of me just now."

"Cospetto, no, Christophero; 'twas thine own fault entirely; thou knowest very well thou shouldst not have kept so close to the *riva*; 'tis against the ordinances. Faith, if I were to have thee up before the 'Signori alle acque,' I trow they would lay upon thee smartly in the shape of fine."

"Well, well," said the other, "whoever was in the wrong, thou hast got the best fare and I the most damage. See you how the side of your boat has bent the iron of my prow and well-nigh broken it in two; but I bear thee no malice, Taddeo."

"Nay, for the matter of that," said the other, "I will keep

up no grudge either. So come along, *compare*, I care not if I stand a *bicchiere di vinello*."

"Diavolo, what dost talk about—a *bicchiere di vinello*! I tell thee, we cannot do less than drink a whole fiasco of the best wine, *Liatico* or *Muscadine* at the least, to the health of his excellency. So push away, *Caro mio*, no one keeps better wine than old Paolo, the tavernajo, near the church of San Nicolo."

While the boatmen were gliding amicably away through one of the lateral canals that led from the Canale Grande to the quarter of San Nicolo, the two gentlemen whom they had been rowing had passed through the pillared hall, and up the marble staircase, and entered a stately apartment such as the Venetian nobles delighted to display for the reception of guests. The walls were covered with ancestral pictures, and the furniture was rich in gold and marble, and curiously wrought tables, and costly ornaments of glass. Giulio now cordially embraced his friend, pressing him within his arms, and touching either cheek with his lips—a custom which at first strikes an Englishman as extravagant and effeminate, but which, in time, he learns to feel is neither the one nor the other amongst people whose impulses are stronger by nature, and put under less restraint by education than are our own.

"Welcome, once more welcome, my dear Jacques, to Venice and to my father's house. I grieve he is not here to receive the friend and benefactor of his son as his merits deserve; but count his house your own; and such poor cheer as it can afford in these times of war and necessity is heartily at your command."

"A thousand thanks, dear Giulio," said the other, warmly returning the pressure of his friend's hand. "But in truth thou dost rate too highly the trifling service that it was my good fortune to render thee in the gay capital of France. The loan of a few gold pieces happily enabled thee to avail thyself of the fortune of the dice, and to retrieve thyself. It was a pleasant sight to see thee take thy revenge upon the sharpers of Paris. But as thou must needs remember this matter, why thou shalt even repay the obligation tenfold by showing me some of the wonders of your celebrated city of Venice, whereof I have heard so much."

"Most willingly, my dear Jacques," said the young Venetian, "though I advertise thee that thou shalt see us now but to small advantage. The present war has drained the city of our gayest nobles, and thou wilt find Venice but a *triste* place just now. But tell me, to what favouring gale we are indebted to thy presence? When we parted in France, a visit to Italy was not in thy thoughts."

"In good faith, Giulio, I am, as thou knowest, but a rolling stone at best, gathering little moss, as the proverb hath it."

"Aye, Jacques, but gaining all the more polish."

"Well, it may be so," said the other. "But now, how wilt thou order our movements?"

"Why, Jacques, it is yet too early to see our *clarissimos* and ladies, so we shall even sally forth in the meantime to see whatever chance may throw in our way. Believe me, there are things in this our Venice that will amuse thee, if it be but for their strangeness."

"It is so reported," said Jacques, "and I long much to inspect them."

"Meanwhile," said Giulio, "your effects shall be brought from the Osteria, and then we shall return to doff our travelling attire, and prepare for visiting. I would willingly make you known to some of my fair countrywomen."

"That is what I most desire. I have always heard that your Venetian dames are not easily accessible to strangers, but that they are beautiful and charming; and in truth I count much on your friendship in affording me this pleasure."

"That will I gladly, and thou shalt confess that rumour has not overrated their loveliness. So look to your heart, Jacques."

The young man laughed with careless gaiety—"Oh, fear not for me, Giulio, I am well nigh proof against the spells of womankind."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the other; "be not over-boastful, my friend."

"Well, well, let us proceed. Thou shalt first pledge me, Jacques, in a cup of such wine as Venice affords."

So saying, Giulio summoned a servant, who speedily entered bearing a salver upon which were various refreshments and two large bottles of coloured glass, small in the neck, but swelling out into very goodly dimensions in the body, and which from their shape had obtained the name of *Ingistere*. When they were set down on the table, the host continued:—

"Here is wine of Cyprus, if thou wilt; or, what sayest thou to this other, which is from the grape of Southern Italy? We count the *Lagrima di Christo* the most delectable of all liquors."

"And with justice," said Jacques; "I have heard of a worthy French monk who was so affected with its delicious flavour, that he exclaimed, '*O Domine, Domine, cur non lacrymasti in regionibus nostris!*'"

"The taste of the good father was more to be commended than his piety," remarked Giulio, with a smile; "but let it pass. So now fill to our pleasant rambles."

"Buon viaggio," said Jacques, pouring out the wine into a drinking glass, and courteously touching the rim of his host's *bicchiere* with his own.

The young men issued forth from the palazzo at the side opposite that which faced the canal, and found themselves in a *cortile*, which having traversed, they passed along various narrow streets or *cali*, and crossing occasionally the small canals by means of steep bridges which were ascended by flights of steps on either side, at length they emerged into more open ground in the front of the church of *San Geminiano*, which forms the western limit of the Piazza di San Marco.

A little beyond the façade of the church, a dense crowd was collected, consisting principally of the lower classes, mechanics, sailors, and labourers, with here and there a merchant or a master of a bottega, the one arrested, it might be, in his passage through the great thoroughfare of Venice, the other attracted from his counter to witness the spectacle at which they were now looking. There were not wanting, too, troops of boys and an abundance of the women of that rank in life who scruple not to be abroad whenever their avocations require, and their large veils of black, white, and yellow, according to their age and condition of wife, maid, or widow, and their glancing necks and shoulders, which were but poorly concealed by such flimsy covering, gave variety and piquancy to the scene. The most casual observer could not fail to be struck with the fact that the heads of the women for the most part were on a level with those of the other sex, and indeed occasionally out-topped them. When one looked down, however, the mystery was solved, for each woman stood in a strange sort of wooden clogs, called *cioppini*, covered with leather of different colours, according to the caprice of the wearer, and varying in height from a few inches to half a foot. The concourse thus brought together were evidently intent upon some object that was in the Piazza, in the direction of Saint Mark's, and as the further progress of the two friends was somewhat impeded, they also turned their eyes in the same direction. Midway in the Piazza was a rude stage of boards, raised up some few feet from the ground upon benches or forms; and upon the stage appeared several persons, some of them with masks of a grotesque character, and all dressed in the tawdry bravery of players of those days. One was readily recognised by the gaudy colours of his hose and doublet, and the immense ruff beneath his chin, as the representative of the gallant or young lover; another, by his visard and antics, was unmistakably the fool or jack-pudding; while two or three women (an unusual thing except in Venice at this period) appeared in various dresses. But the principal of the troop was the *ciarlatano* or mountebank, who stood at one extremity of the stage near to a large chest, in which were deposited a strange variety of the most incongruous things imaginable. A flourish of music ensued, which, to speak truly, was more commendable for its noise and energy than for any harmony which was produced; indeed, harmony could not be reasonably expected from the

musicians themselves, or the instruments upon which they performed, which were cornets, lutes, and hurdy-gurdys, or vielles as they were called. During this performance, the ciarlatano opened the chest and drew forth his various wares. There were unguents of divers kinds in bottles of various colours; waters and lotions of marvellous virtues; drugs of unheard of potency; elixirs, salves, cosmetics, songs, charms, and a multitude of other wonders which no tongue save his own could recount or describe. These, as he took them forth one by one, he held up to the gaze of the multitude, and when the first tempest of music was stilled, the ciarlatano raised himself to his full height, and extending both his hands, the fingers of which were covered with thick, silver rings, he held up a phial with an oily liquid in one hand, and flourished the other as he addressed the people.

Jacques said to his friend—"Stop a little, Giulio; I would gladly listen to one of your ciarlatani, who, I hear, are the most wonderful in the world."

The young men accordingly stood still, and had no difficulty in hearing the mountebank's oration.

"Eccomi, cittadini di Venezia, eccomi, Bartolomeo Venturini, medico, magico, astrologico, dentista e professore. Here am I, who can read the stars, cure all diseases, and draw teeth—*senz'alcun dolore*—without your feeling as much as a twitch of pain. Messires, have any of you here a bad tooth? Eh ben, I can draw it, if it have one prong, or two prongs, or three prongs (and here he held up a finger for each prong), be they straight or crooked (twisting his fingers together), it is all the same to Bartolomeo Venturini. Ebbene, qui vuol un di queste mirabile bottiglie? And only two zecchini a-piece." The ciarlatano upon this held out the bottle to the crowd.

"What is it good for?" asked an old woman who had made her way up near to the stage.

"What is it good for?" said Bartolomeo, repeating her question. "What is it *not* good for, mamma mia? 'Tis good for cholics and rheumatism—for the ague and for the fever; aye, per bacco, and for the plague itself."

"Santissima Virgine!" ejaculated the old woman, at the dreaded name of the plague. "If 'tis good for all these, 'twil do something for the rheum in my eyes, belike."

"Sicuro, madre mia, sicuro, 'tis the very thing for them. Here"—and he gave the poor old soul the bottle, and got her money.

"Ah, bella, bella," addressing a smart young widow, "thou hast nothing amiss with thine eyes, and needst no salve or wash for them, but I have the choicest cosmetic for thy cheeks, that will make them glow like the brazen horses above St. Mark's, there beyond, with the sun shining on them."

The widow simpered, and said nothing; nevertheless, when the quack held out a little box of unguent to her and said, "Only four zecchine, bella donna," the money speedily found its way into his hand, and the bottle into hers.

"Who wants juplars for all sorts of weakness of the limbs? Ecco una medicina maravigliosa! una medicina santissima!" and he held up high in the air a small paper packet "the receipt whereof was gotten from the blessed Saint Luke the physician himself. Know you not all of you Giuseppe Ladro, the Calzolaio, the cobbler, that lives hard by? Well, his brother Tomaso, un povero diavolo, did I not cure him of a weakness and anguish of his loins, when he was doubled up—thus—così?" And the knave mimicked a man bent together with pain, in a manner so irresistibly comic, that the whole of the rabble burst into shouts of laughter.

And so the wily charlatan continued to sell his nostrums, and above all his love philtres and charms in all directions. Then, when he rested for a while, the others began to play and sing, and the jack-pudding amused the bystanders with all sorts of jokes and smart things suitable to his auditory.

After a short time, Bartolomeo again advanced to the front of the stage with a knife in his hand, and, baring his left arm, he inflicted a frightful gash mid-way between the wrist and elbow that seemed to cut almost into the bone. The blood

spouted from the arteries so frightfully, that one would have thought the man could not fail to bleed to death in a few moments, and the shrieks of the women, and ejaculations of the men, at once testified to their horror and astonishment. The mountebank, however, poured upon the wound a dark glutinous balsam, and in a moment the blood was stauncher, and when the arm was wiped the wound was not discoverable. This marvel being performed, he drew from the inexhaustible chest a large viper, and suffered the reptile to crawl and twine round his naked arm. He was just announcing to the wondering crowd how that this same viper, with whose sting he played, was lineally descended from the very reptile that stung the blessed Saint Paul at Melita, when his eye recognised Giulio and his friend at the outer extremity of his audience.

"Ah! noble young gentleman, excellent clarissimi!" cried he. "What can Bartolomeo do for you? Here is a mirific unguent from a cock's comb to make your beards grow; or will you have a philtre of agnus castus to cause all the doors of Venice to fly open to you, and to set every bella ragazzina in the town dying of love for your sweet persons?"

The youths, as might be expected, only smiled but made no reply, and now endeavoured to make their way along the skirt of the crowd, seeing that the eyes of the people were turned upon them. But the ciarlatano was not to be thus baffled, for he well knew that a joke at the expense of a noble, when it could be indulged in safely, was ever relished by the people with the keenest enjoyment.

"Nay, do not depart yet, eccellentissimi: we have got choice drugs for nobles. Here is a famous purge for pride; this other is a fomentation to bring down vanity; and here are sweating powders to assuage sensuality."

The young men had by this time pressed onward, and had reached almost the centre of the Piazza, and come right opposite the front of the mountebank's stage; Giulio turned round quickly at these last words, and looking scornfully at the utterer, exclaimed—

"Per dio, varlet, wert thou not beneath my displeasure, it were well done to send thee to the office of the '*Cinque della Pace*,' hard by. A score of stripes across thy back would, I trow, be a better medicine to cure thee of petulance, than all thy drugs and nostrums."

Bartolomeo was stung by the bitterness of the youth's rebuke, more than he would have been by louder or angrier words; and as the laws for the internal regulation of the city were administered somewhat laxly during the war, he was emboldened to take his revenge. So he continued his bantering:—

"Brave gentlemen, would ye have the latest news from the troops, seeing that ye keep at home with your mothers; or shall I consult the stars and cast your nativities. Beseech you, let me calculate your horoscopes, noble sirs?" continued he, taking from the chest a paper covered with squares and triangles, and marked with strange characters. "Or would ye rather have a proof of my skill in the wonderful art of Palmistry? Show me your hands, sweet sirs, and I will tell you your fortunes, incontinently. Nay, then," he continued, seeing that the persons whom he thus interrogated made no reply, "nay, then, I shall show you, noble sirs, that Bartolomeo Venturini knows you better than you know yourselves. Your fates are written on your faces for him who can decipher the legend by the divine light of the science of metoposcopy."

At this moment the faces of the young men were turned directly towards the speaker, and he proceeded to comment upon their features in a rapid and elevated voice, which gradually lost all the bitterness of tone in which he had so lately accosted them. Indeed, he was now apparently hurried away by the contemplation of his subject, forgetful of everything else; and one could well believe that he was as much the dupe of his own fantasies as were those whom he endeavoured to mystify—a result not uncommon with persons who had given themselves to the study of the occult sciences, as they were called.

"Ah! how plain are the planetary influences upon that

countenance," cried he—but to which of the youths he alluded it was impossible to discover;—"I trace them as clearly as I would upon the heavens of a starlit night. How *Mars* dominates on that high forehead! Choleric, fiery, courageous, and, at the same time, haughty and somewhat reckless; he is one who brooks not readily to bend to the will of another. A fine nose, truly, with a well-defined nostril—ah! *Venus* lies there, as if it were her own Paphos; I find he is of a sweet nature, loving and somewhat voluptuous, and one who shall be loved with the whole heart of woman. But, then, I like not the curl of that lip: truly, *Mercury* is malign in the mouth, and crosses *Venus* with a sinister influence. Alas, what a pity! Assuredly, some evil awaits him, and that in a quarter whence he least expects it—sad, sad!"

The man muttered a few words which were inaudible: then turning, as it seemed, to the consideration of the other face, he said:—

"Dio, what fine eyes!—*Sol* in the meridian and *Luna* at the full. Truly hast thou a benevolent and noble disposition: faithful in friendship, and true; ingenuous, yet secret; sincere, yet reserved and thoughtful; engaging manners; no craven anxiety about the future; imaginative, versatile, fond of travel and of knowledge, a lover of the arts. And yet see how *Saturn* lowers in that left ear, and flings his pale, leaden shadow across the sallow cheek! Ahime! thou, too, young man, shalt have thy hour of sorrow."

While the ciarlatano was uttering these disjointed comments upon the characters and destinies of the youths, mingled with the unintelligible jargon of that now-exploded lore which pretended to assign to each of the planets and zodiacal signs a particular feature over which it was said to exercise a special influence,—the rabble listening the while in mute wonder,—the objects of his remarks, as if wrought on by an irresistible fascination, stood still, affected to some extent by the enthusiasm of the speaker. Now, however, they held on their way again, and had nearly effected their escape from the crowd, when the voice of the conjuror pursued them in deep and solemn accents:—

"Thou shalt seek a bride in her house, but thou shalt find the angel of death there before thee! She whom thou wouldst take to thy heart shall be ravished from thee for ever. Through the portals whence the bride should go forth in the morning to the altar, shall the corpse be borne at evening to the grave. So do the planets portend, and so do I declare."

The words of this prophecy, though it was doubtful to which of the young men they were addressed, arrested at once the step and the attention of Giulio, and made him turn pale with a mingled feeling of rage and horror. Half drawing his short rapier, which was concealed beneath his cloak, he was springing forward to administer a chastisement upon Bartolomeo that would, in all probability, have defied the efficacy of his wonderful styptic to heal, when Jacques, seeing at a glance all the danger of so rash a step—for the people observed the movement and shewed symptoms of taking part with Bartolomeo,—seized his friend by the arm, and hurried him forward towards the church of San Marco.

"Nay, Giulio," said Jacques, as they stood beneath the western portico of the chapel, "thou shouldst not heed the random words of that poor devil. If the stars are to declare the course of our lives, they must be conjured by some more potent influences than yonder quacksalver can command."

Giulio laughed, but made no reply, and so they passed between the columns of porphyry and verd-antique which support the arches of the façade, and passed into the interior of the building.

But, despite of his gay laugh, the mind of the young Venetian was not altogether at ease. At the period of which we write, it will be borne in mind, men's intellects were but little emancipated from the trammels of gross superstition. A belief in the occult sciences was everywhere prevalent, and the most enlightened minds did not venture to discredit the marvels of witchcraft and demonology. Amongst other dark lore, astrology was then in high repute; and we cannot wonder at the universal credence it obtained in this age, when we recollect

that two centuries later, Catherine de Medicis and Cardinal Mazarin regulated their conduct in every affair of moment by astrological predictions; that Dee gained influence over the strong mind of our own Elizabeth, and visited the courts of Poland and Bohemia; and, later still, Lilly gave public lectures in astrology, calculated nativities, received a golden chain from the warlike Charles Gustavus of Sweden, and was consulted by Charles the First of England. It could not, therefore, be expected that Giulio Polani should be above the prejudices or the superstitions of his age; and though his disposition did not lead him to shrink at physical danger, in the case of supernatural influences he was no more valiant than others. Thus a morbid sensibility of feeling, increased, no doubt, by the interview of the preceding evening with Bianca, and the revival of all his old affections, made him apply the words of the ciarlatano to himself and to her whom he already hoped would yet be his bride; and without acknowledging to himself that he believed thoroughly in the prophetic powers of Bartolomeo, yet neither did he feel the assurance that the prophecy, strange as it seemed, was nothing more than what his friend Jacques had pronounced it—the random words of a mere quacksalver.

For a time, despite of himself, he was moody and abstracted; but—not caring to let his friend see that he was really disturbed by what Jacques did not think worth a thought, though it might apply as well to the one as the other—he rallied his spirits, and by a strong effort shook off the uneasy feeling. Occupying himself in showing to the stranger the glories of a city of which every Venetian was justly proud, Giulio soon forgot the scene of the morning, and not a shadow lingered in his memory to mar the sunshine of his heart.

CHAPTER VII.

"O mercy God! what masking stuff is here?
What's this? a sleeve?—'tis like a demi-cannon.
What! up and down carved like an apple tart?
Here snip and nip, and cut and slish and slash.
Why what the devil callest thou this?"—*Taming of the Shrew*.

It might be then an hour of the mid-day when the two friends sat together in one of the saloons of the Palazzo Polani. They had partaken of that meal which in those days preceded noon, though succeeding generations and the advance of civilisation has gradually postponed it, till, in our own days, it is never witnessed by the sun. In a word, they had dined, and now sat in pleasant converse previous to going abroad for an afternoon's lounge. On the table beside them stood various flasks of those fine wines the Venetians imported from all parts.

The style in which the gentlemen were dressed indicated that their intention was to seek the places of fashionable resort. They had laid aside the plainer attire in which we found them in the early forenoon, and now appeared, each in the costume of his own country. Jacques wore a jupon, or cote-hardie reaching half-way down his thigh, at this period considered a very smart and fashionable curtailment of the length of these garments. It was of black velvet, and the sleeves opened midway in the upper arm, so that the arm itself could pass out at pleasure, leaving the rest of the sleeve to hang down till the wearer should be disposed to draw it on. At present it was not in use, and the part of the arm thus uncovered displayed the tight-fitting sleeve of the under garment or vest, which was of satin; the right sleeve was red, the left one yellow. A belt of embroidered leather passed loosely over the hips, so that it sloped downwards beneath the stomach; and from it depended, in front, a short sword or dagger in a sheath of crimson velvet, tipped with a ferule of gold. The hose, like the vest, fitted tightly to the person, from the thigh to the ankle, and was of the same colours and material as the inner sleeves, only that those colours were on opposite sides—the right leg being yellow, while the left was red. His shoes were made of black velvet, very long, and tapering to a sharp point at the toe, and were fastened to the foot by a band of black velvet which passed over the instep. Round his neck was a cape of crimson velvet edged with gold; and on a

chair near him lay his cap, which was also of crimson velvet, ormented with a large button of gold, and a plume of white feathers; across the cap were carelessly thrown his embroidered gloves.

The costume of Giulio Polani was very different from that of his guest, or from what the Venetian gentlemen of more advanced years were in the habit of wearing. But it will be remembered that Giulio was yet within the age of full manhood, and considerable latitude in dress was permitted to the young nobles during their non-age, before which period the sumptuary laws in relation to dress were not enforced. He wore a doublet of mulberry-coloured satin tabby, which was slashed on the breast and sleeves in the form of a cross, through which appeared the lining of yellow taffeta; the dress was closed down the front from the neck by buttons or studs of gold, and terminated at the upper end by a lace ruff, and a chain of Venetian wrought gold hung midway down his breast. The hose matched the doublet in material and colour, and was slashed upon the thigh, and shoes of dark Spanish morocco leather completed his attire.

"And so thou sayest, Jacques, that thou findest this, our Venice, does not disappoint thy expectations?"

"In faith, no, Giulio; for once, Fame hath not been a liar. Your Chiesa di San Marco hath not its equal in the world. And the palaces of your nobles may compare with those of any other land."

"Ah, but thou shouldst see us under happier circumstances, when war has not drained us of our wealth and thinned our city of its noblest, and wealthiest, and gayest. But, come, there is still somewhat for thee to see, and thou shalt now make thy selection. Shall we take a turn or two in the piazza and piazzetta of Saint Mark? There you shall be sure to meet such of our *claressimi* and gay youths as are in town. 'Tis the fashionable promenade of Venice in the afternoon."

"Faith, Giulio, thou must arrange our mode of proceeding thyself. To me all is new."

"Well, then, let us first to the promenade. After that we shall stroll into the Merceria, where we shall not fail to see some of our fair dames and donzelle looking at the mercers' wares and the stationery. Afterwards we shall step into a gondola, and run down to the Muranò to have a stroll in the public gardens, and taste the most delicious oysters in the world."

"And see your manufactory of crystal, Giulio, of which I have heard so much. Is it true what they report, that the glass has such an excellent virtue and purity that it will not bear the slightest taint of any poison, but will incontinently break if but a drop be poured into it?"

"Such is the common belief," answered the Venetian; "but I cannot certify the fact of my own knowledge."

"Come, then, Giulio, let us make use of our time. As an old traveller, I know its value."

The young men now rose from the table, and prepared to leave the house, Giulio throwing over his gay attire the Venetian cloak of sombre black; but to indemnify himself for this compliance with the gravity of the Venetians, he placed on his head a bonnet of rich morone velvet, having an ornamental band and a rich loop and button.

We shall not follow the two friends in their promenade through the piazza and the piazzetta, nor detail how the young Venetian explained to his companion the manner in which the different offices and grades of the Venetian nobles were indicated by the various colours with which their gowns were faced, the length of the sleeves, or of the flaps that fell over the left shoulder. In one respect, however, Jacques observed, that they were all similarly attired, namely, in the flat black cap of felt, which was very low and small and had no brim, and in the small band of linen that fell down not more than an inch or two. Giulio encountered more than one of those who had been his intimate companions before he had gone to travel; the meeting in those cases was in remarkable contrast to the general sobriety of demeanour which the Venetians affected. They embraced and kissed each other on the cheeks,

and repeated the salutation at parting; while in the cases of recognition between mere acquaintances, each made a low formal bow, and placed the right hand upon the breast.

"Ah, what a stately figure!" said Jacques to his friend, as they passed down the Merceria.

Giulio looked in the direction to which his companion pointed, and replied:

"What, that lady in the veil of white holland edged with bone-lace; she that wears the robe of flowered black silk with enormous sleeves reaching almost to the ground?"

"And who walks upon red chioppine half a cubit high," added Jacques. "Pardieu, she would surely fall if she were not borne up under the left arm by that serving-man. The same."

Giulio laughed heartily, as he surveyed the stately gentlewoman to whom his friend alluded.

"Ah, *carrissimo*!" he replied, "that is indeed a very noble signora, as you would have at once known from the height of her chioppine, had you been familiar with these our customs of Venice. That is the lady Lucretzia Polani, my very honoured kinswoman, one of the most pious matrons, as well as the most inveterate gossips, in all Venice. I dare be sworn she is now going to gratify her vanity for dress in some of the fashionable shops, after which she will most likely turn her steps to the chiesa to perform her devotions. Ah! there, too, is my cousin, her fair daughter Caterina."

"What, that donzella with the huge veil of pale yellow silk, which is quilled in such a strange fashion? in good sooth, it is slight and aerial as gossamer."

"And as transparent as a summer cloud. I warrant me, Jacques, you have no difficulty in discovering through it that Caterina is a charming brunette, with a pair of black eyes that sparkle like stars at midnight."

"And a finely-turned shoulder and bosom," added Jacques, "which that cobweb kerchief of lawn doth ill conceal."

"At all events this meeting is most fortunate; let us pay our respects; I shall make you known to the ladies."

So saying, Giulio advanced, and lifting his bonnet from his head (a reverence which Venetians only showed to men of the highest rank and to ladies), and making a profound and courteous obeisance, said:

"I salute the noble Signora Lucretzia Polani. Have I the felicity to find her excellency in the enjoyment of good health?"

The matron drew herself up haughtily, not recognising the person who addressed her; but the sharper eyes and quicker memory of Caterina in a moment discovered who the seeming stranger was, and so, with a joyous exclamation, she said:

"Why, dearest mother, have you forgotten our kinsman, Giulio?"

"Ah, Santissima Maria, is it possible?" said the elder lady.

"'Tis even as my fair cousin hath said," replied Giulio; "let me thank her for her kind recognition," and he saluted the blushing beauty with more warmth and gallantry than he had shown towards the matron.

"Well, Giulio, I am heartily glad to see thee, child; why, thou art grown a man outright. But when did you return to Venice? where did you come from? what have you been doing? how are you? what news from the count, your father? Ah, I have a thousand questions to ask you, and so many things to tell you, too; who is that foretiere?" This last she added in a lower tone, glancing towards Giulio's friend, who stood a little apart.

"With your excellency's permission I will make known to you my most honoured friend and sometime companion in Paris, the Sieur Jacques Dela Mole."

The matron returned the bow of the young gentlemen with a gracious yet ceremonious movement of the head; the bright eyes of Caterina gave a warmer acknowledgment to the courtly salutation, which the youth concluded with a glance of respectful admiration and a gallant pressure of his hand upon his heart.

The matron turned towards Giulio and resumed—

"I am just going to a mercer's booth yonder, to see some Dalmatian velvets, which he hath apprised me have just arrived to him, and are, he says, of rare beauty. Shall I have the honour of your escort and that of your friend, and the benefit of your judgments in the matter? You travellers should be judges of everything."

The gentlemen assented. Giulio placed himself at the right side of his elder relative, while Jacques attached himself to the younger lady. When they had inspected the merchant's wares, the matron selected a figured velvet cloth, richly embroidered with gold, and demanded its price.

"Ah!" said the crafty mercer, with an obsequious bow, "the Signora's taste is unimpeachable; that is the finest cloth of velvet in Venice. Her highness the Dogressa has as yet been the only lady to whom I have shown it, and she has purchased a robe of it."

This announcement at once decided the lady's choice, and she accordingly ordered a mantle of the costly fabric. Let not our readers be surprised at this extravagance of a Venetian lady. At the period of which we write, their expensive luxury in dress had reached a height that must have been very formidable to their lords, with whose graver apparel that of their wives and daughters so strikingly contrasted. To such a pitch had the feminine passion for dress arisen, that in the beginning of the fifteenth century some of the Venetian ladies appeared in robes that were covered over with gold, and of such vastness that the sleeves touched the ground. The senate was at length obliged to interfere to check this perilous mania, and by a sumptuary law of the year 1402, it was ordered that the sleeves of the ladies' robes should not exceed in circumference eight *quarters*, and that the robes themselves should not be wider than eight *braccia*. As to the matter of the robes of gold, "it appeared," in the words of an old Venetian writer, "to be a very grave affair to the fathers," and accordingly they ordained that it should not be lawful for any woman to be so attired for the future. At this day one smiles to think of the dread powers of the law being brought to bear upon such things as the cut of a lady's sleeve or the texture of her garments. Were such tyranny attempted to be recorded upon our statute-book in the benign reign of Queen Victoria, we verily believe that "the better half" of the nation would be in a state of insurrection, and the *modistes* of the kingdom would organise the overthrow of the ministry.

"Now," said the elder lady, when she had completed her purchase, "I am going to the chiesa; one, you know, my dear young friend, should never be remiss in the discharge of religious duties. I never am. Is not that so, Caterina?"

"Indeed it is, dearest mother," said the girl; "I sometimes think your over strict devotion may injure your health."

"I am a good Catholic, I humbly trust," replied the lady, with a self-satisfied air that partook but little of humility. "Gentlemen, will you be disposed to accompany us to prayers?"

An arch smile lurked on the lips of the daughter, which her thin veil could not entirely conceal, at this invitation from her mother. The young men, however, excused themselves on the score of previous engagements.

"Ah, che infortunio!" replied the matron. "Well, you must assuredly call to see me before evening. We shall be at home in an hour, and shall be happy to receive the *Sieur de la Mole* at our Palazzo."

A willing assent was given to this invitation, and the two parties took leave of each other. The ladies proceeded to their devotions, while Giulio and his friend stepped into a gondola, and glided through the small canals in a north-easterly direction, till they emerged into the lagunes and entered into the canal leading to the island of Murano.

Then, as now, the island of Murano was, to use the language of one of our own countrymen who visited it some centuries ago, "a very delectable and populous place, having many faire buildings both public and private, and divers very pleasant gardens;" it is not, therefore, to be wondered that the two friends spent a considerable time in so agreeable a locality. The sun was, it might be, half-way on his westward journey

towards the blue hills of Verona, when the young men found themselves again in Venice.

"And now," said Giulio, "I propose we pay our promised visit to Madonna Lucretzia. You will find an hour pass away not unpleasantly, believe me, with her sprightly daughter; for the better insuring whereof, I shall take upon myself to occupy her honoured mother."

"An excellent arrangement," said Jacques, smiling; "let us proceed forthwith."

The prow of the gondola was turned in the direction indicated by Giulio, and in a few moments they entered the principal reception-room of the palazzo.

We will not venture to affirm that either of the youths felt any very great disappointment when they found that the beautiful Caterina was its only occupant. She was superbly clothed in a dress of rich flounced brocade, so fashioned as to expose to view the bosom and back to an extent that, in our days and country, would be thought scarcely consistent with maidenly propriety; but the truth is, that the over strictness exercised over the ladies of Venice in their attire and deportment out of doors, produced the natural result of stimulating them to greater licence in their houses. The waist was long, so as to allow room for the display of a rich stomacher; the neck was encircled by an enormous quilled ruff of bone-lace, and the yellow veil of the morning was replaced by one of white gauze, which was thrown back from the head, and stood out from the shoulders like an immense wing; in her hand she held a circular fan, and over her head towered the mass of crisped curls in two mountains glittering with unguents that made them look like hills in the sunset. In a few moments a waiting-maid, fantastically dressed, as was the habit of her class, entered, bearing from the signora a request that Giulio would come to her in her dressing-room, a request with which he immediately complied, leaving his fair cousin and his agreeable friend to the enjoyment of a *tête-à-tête*.

Madonna Lucretzia Polani received her young kinsman within the very penetralia of the shrine—a favour only conceded to those who are nearly allied, or on terms of the most familiar intimacy. It so happened, that at the moment, an operation of a most important and mysterious nature was in progress; and as it was peculiar to Venetian ladies, and has now, alas! with many another peculiarity—things of wisdom and glory as well as of vanity and folly—passed away for ever, we shall count ourselves fortunate in being able to record it for the admiration, if not for the imitation, of the fair daughters of our own land. To speak plainly, then, the noble dame was then undergoing that peculiar process by which the Venetian *chevelure* was worked up into that wonderful formation which we have already alluded to. Be it known, then, that the Lady Lucretzia sat in a window which commanded a south-western aspect, so that the sun at the moment was shining strongly into the room through the open *jalousies*; her hair was gathered up all round her head, and enclosed within a high circlet of lead, somewhat like a crown, which fitted close to the head; within this, a serving-maiden poured certain oleaginous and perfumed drugs, the properties of which were to dye the hair of a light colour, a hue much affected by the Venetian women, as enhancing the brilliancy of a dark complexion, which they considered the most beautiful. The lady held a mirror in her hand, and from time to time inspected the operation; and when she deemed that a sufficient quantity of the dye had been absorbed by her hair she then directed the next step in the process, which was to fling back her hair and spread it out over the rim of the leaden circlet, so that it was exposed to the sun, which gradually bleached and dried it. This was a slow and tedious process one may judge; but vanity is a passion that is full of patience and as enduring as charity itself. It was in this stage of the proceeding that Giulio arrived, and the lady hailed his coming, as it afforded an agreeable mode of alleviating the tedium of the toilette, and the best opportunity of satisfying her love of acquiring and communicating everything new or interesting.

"Welcome, my dear kinsman," said the lady, as the young man entered, "you see I accord to you the privilege of a relation."

The youth bowed his acknowledgment, while the lady continued—"Come, sit down here beside me. Well," she proceeded when he was seated, "*Che nuove ci portate?* What news have you for me? You must tell me all about your travels, and first of all about this friend of yours. Where did you make his acquaintance?"

"In Paris last year."

"Ah! is he a Frenchman?"

"I have always considered him to be so, but in truth I never took the trouble of inquiring."

"Dear me, how strange; never to have the curiosity to ask him where he came from. Do you know any of his family?"

"Not one. He had no relatives that I know of in Paris, nor for ought I know in the world."

"My dear Giulio, how very imprudent of you to form an intimacy with you know not whom. You don't know how disadvantageous such an acquaintance may prove to you."

"True, dear signora, but I know how advantageous it has proved to me. He has rendered me a signal service."

"Ah! what was it? I should so like to know."

"Pardon me, I am not at liberty to disclose it. He has insisted that I should not."

"Well, how very singular. But now tell me every thing about yourself."

Giulio being under no restraint on this subject, proceeded to detail such points as he thought might prove interesting to his auditress. Meantime the sun did its duty upon the hue and moisture of the lady's locks, after which the serving-maiden removed the leaden crown, and heating in a brazier, which stood at the further end of the apartment, a pair of frizzling or crisping irons, she plied them with such skill upon the locks of her mistress, that in a short time she raised a vast superstructure over the forehead, which acuminated at either side, in one of those monstrous peaks. When this operation was performed, nothing further remained to complete the personal adornment of the Signora Polani, save drawing on a loose robe of satin tabby. Having done this, she graciously took the young man's arm, and proceeded to the apartment where we left Jacques and Caterina engaged in a *tête-à-tête*, which we have no doubt each party had wit enough to improve to the utmost.

THE IRISH INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION.

THE 12th of May, 1853, was a great day for Ireland; for on that day the triumphant experiment of 1851 was repeated in the centre of her beautiful metropolis. Of the influence of such an experiment on the welfare of England's sister kingdom there can be little doubt; for, though the Exhibition of 1853 is on a much smaller scale than that of 1851, it is in many respects in advance of it. Indeed, if we consider for a moment the different positions of the two cities—London, the metropolis of the British empire and of the whole world, Dublin, the principal city of a kingdom but lately risen from the slough of famine and despond—we shall easily understand how far the Irish people have profited by the great example set before them. In the nineteenth century, with the powers of the printing-press, of steam, and of electricity to aid us, we are reviving—it has been well observed—in new forms, adapted to our wants and social states, the great fairs and chivalric gatherings of the middle ages, and the classic games and contests of still remoter times. We have found in the arts of industry and the departments of trade a glorious embodiment of the spirit of modern civilisation. This is the secret of the exhibitions which are now springing up in all the great capitals of the world; this is the motive power which brings the artists and manufacturers of New York and London, Paris and Dublin, Berlin and Petersburg, Antwerp and Vienna, into such intimate connexion and friendly rivalry. The present generation of men, devoted to peaceful pursuits, has not the less, on that account, the enthusiasm and romance of character which belonged to the men of the old time. These sentiments remain substantially the same, though the complexion of them has changed with the circumstances under which they have been evolved. Four hundred years ago the public will and spirit was expressed in tournaments and crusades—to-day the same chivalric sentiment shows itself in exhibitions of international industry; and it is simply the force of events which has substituted executive committees, and glass and iron palaces, and the bloodless contention of skilled labour, for lists, and men-at-arms, and fierce encounters with lance and shield. If this be so, there is an immense and happy significance in the circumstance of that second great display opened to the industries of all countries is held in the metropolis of Ireland. Several weeks in advance of our New York Exhibition, though considerably later in the field—far in advance of the Parisian industrial show, and winning the earliest laurels even from the Crystal Palace at Sydenham—the Dublin International Exhibition may be looked upon as a great hope and promise for the future of Ireland.

At this moment, not only are the "eyes of Europe" upon

the Irish metropolis, but "our own correspondents" are busy in recording the triumphs which the Industrial Exhibition is every day achieving. And it is a proud reflection for Irishmen, that they have raised this beautiful building, and filled it with the evidences of skill and the products of industry, by means entirely their own. Without government assistance of any kind, but by sheer force of perseverance, and through the patriotic endeavours of a single individual, the Irish Exhibition of 1853 has won for itself a name and distinction which cannot but be beneficial to the social, industrial, and political welfare of the people.

We have already—*ante* vol. i. p. 153—made our readers acquainted with the patriotic Mr. Dargan, to whom, indeed, the present Exhibition is mainly owing; or we might show how, rising from the people, and possessing a spirit, energy, and liberality which appears to belong as much, or more, to the merchants and traders of our time, as to the inheritors of great historic names, he has laboured untiringly, grudging neither time nor money, for the good of his country. Although upwards of £100,000 have been advanced by Mr. Dargan for the purposes of the Exhibition, for the repayment of which he looks alone to the receipts at the doors, it must never be forgotten; that the main motive of this gentleman has been, not pecuniary benefit or advantageous employment of capital, but a desire to place within the reach of his humble countrymen, in the midst of their own metropolis, a collection of the products of human skill and ingenuity, the contemplation of which might encourage them to work out with patience and self-reliance the great problem of their own social and political welfare.

The beautiful building in which the Exhibition is held is the production of Mr. Benson, from whose designs it has been erected. By reference to the annexed ground plan, the distribution of the various parts will be understood.

The Irish Exhibition Building differs in many important respects from its progenitor in Hyde-park. Like it, the framing of the building is composed of iron columns and girders, but, unlike it, the whole light is admitted from above, a portion only of the roof being glazed. The peculiarly light and airy appearance of the Crystal Palace is therefore lost; nevertheless, sufficient light, well toned down, is admitted to all parts of the present building to set off the objects exhibited to the best advantage. If the reader will turn to page 152, vol. i., he will perceive what an elegant appearance the main front of the building makes. It was originally intended to erect it of much smaller dimensions, and the chief features were a main central hall with side aisles, each hall having a grand semicircular roof. This arrangement of the space still